

## THE BOOKS ON MOHANDAS K. GANDHI IN THE CHINESE PRESS OF THE REPUBLICAN PERIOD

di Monica de Togni

In order to begin to illustrate how nonviolent political actions has been received in China during the Republican period, this paper presents an analysis of how the biography and ideas of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) spread in the Chinese press through the about 30 books expressly devoted to his life and thought published in the first half of the XXth century.

The present paper deals with how Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), also known as the Mahatma, the Big Soul as he was named by Rabindranath Tagore, has been presented to the Chinese readers during the Republican period through the monographs especially devoted to him. The figure of Mohandas Gandhi has been widely studied in India and in the West mainly in relations to the history of Indian decolonization and in relation to his contribution to humanity as a whole with the adoption of nonviolent means of political action (*satyagraha* “zeal for truth”, variously translated as *zhenli bachi* 真理把持, *zhenli zhi lu* 真理之路, or *zhuiqiu zhenli* 追求真理”: what let a person to have a correct insight into situations, meaning peaceful and direct insight, and results in his refusal to submit to the wrong or to cooperate with it in any way, that is “nonviolent resistance” *feibaoli dikang* 非暴力抵抗) to achieve the respect of human life and rights, while much less attention has been devoted to Gandhi’s historical figure and to the influence that his theoretical and practical formulation of *satyagraha* had over social changes and political upheaval in China during the XXth century.

In order to describe Gandhi’s legacy in China, it will be presented an analysis of how his biography and ideas spread in the Chinese press through the about 30 books expressly devoted to his actions and thought that has been published since the first half of the XXth century. The aim is also to start to illustrate how nonviolent political action was received in this Country, theme that will be developed in the future, whereas studies on this matter are considered minor in relations to the studies on the Nationalist and Communist Party. This situation of relatively scanty interest for nonviolence may be exemplified comparing the number of articles included in the CNKI 中国知网 database ([www.cnki.net](http://www.cnki.net)). There, searching in the category of “all documents”, we find that the keyword *feibaoli* gives us 655 entries, and a search in full text with the *feibaoli* gives 2,487 entries, *heping zhuyi* 和平主义 (pacifism) gives 927 entries as full text, and 333 as keyword, while a search in “all documents” of Mao Zedong 毛泽东 gives 49,419 articles for the full text, and 70,262 for the keyword, for Gongchandang 共产党 (Chinese Communist Party) it gives 102,989 entries as keyword, 377,710 as full text, Guomindang 国民党 (Nationalist Party) records 120,326 entries as full text, and 18,884 as keyword. Gandhi 甘地 (Gandhi) turns out to be the keyword for 484 items, and to be present in “full text” in 2,327 entries, moreover we have to remember that this includes Mohandas Karamchand, Indira, Rajiv, and Sonia Gandhi (and sometimes even Gansu province!). It is to know too that these data concern publications edited mainly on the second half of the 20th century.

Anyway, which one is the first of the few books published in China on Gandhi?

Searching the collections of the National Library in Beijing and of the Municipal Library of Shanghai (but the result does not change through Worldcat), the very first book is a special issue of *Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志 for its twentieth anniversary from the foundation (thus in 1924), an extremely interesting little book in 7 chapters on Mohandas Gandhi and an appendix on the movement for the independence

of India<sup>1</sup>. In the «Short biography» that opens the book, he is presented as a great revolutionary, one of the two biggest figure for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, being compared to Lenin.

The second chapter, «Gandhi and the social transformation of India» (*Gandhi yu Yindu shehui gaizao*, 甘地与印度社会改造), also shows a very high consideration for Mohandas Gandhi and his actions, assessing that his social revolution is comparable to that of Gotama Siddhatta, the historical Buddha. It contrasts through a quick sketch the negative influences of British rule over India, that obstructed the internal social changes, with the contributions of Gandhi against the system of rigid division in castes, the political instrument of passive resistance, the absolute tolerance for all the religions, and the “return to the spinning wheel” movement to improve families’ economy. I think it is important to remark that this article goes in the opposite direction to Mohandas Gandhi opinion that the problems of India do not come mainly from the British rule, but they are originated by Indians themselves. Whereas we have to remember also that most of the words written by Gandhi himself were still to be translated in Chinese, the first biography of Gandhi is the translation (74 p.) in 1925<sup>2</sup> of the work by the French 1915’s Nobel prize in Literature Romain Rolland (1866-1944), *Mahatma Gandhi*<sup>3</sup>.

The third chapter, «The non-cooperation movement» (*Bu hezuo yundong*, 不合作运动), explains this “weapon” in its gandhian interpretation, wondering about the adhesion by Indian people to its application to action in the field, and asserting to wait to see if this new political “instruments” sorts the effect of independence from British rule, thus giving a new revolutionary tool to the world. To clarify this tool, the forth chapter gives the translation of the peroration stated by Gandhi in front of the Judge of Ahmedabad, Mr. Broomfiel, after his arrest for the unrest at Chauri Chaura near Agra, the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1922, which can be seen as a comprehensive summary of his beliefs and action for social changes. The fifth chapter explains to Chinese readers what *satyagraha* is (in this occasion transliterated as *sadiagelaha* 萨谛阿葛拉哈, instead than translated) and the theoretical basis of this Gandhi’s re-elaboration of Indian religions, mainly from the Bhagavad Gita<sup>4</sup>, since the period of his South-African experience<sup>5</sup>.

The sixth chapter is devoted to the translation of two letters written by Gandhi to the people of Bombay explaining the reasons of the fast he had started in connection with clashes that happened shortly before in Bombay and what “nonviolence” is and how it has to be put in practice, because the people of Bombay showed they still do not understand what non-cooperation means.

The seventh chapter is the translation of the letter of a young American in India explaining to his mother who is Mahatma Gandhi, a good “expedient” to let a message pass through a personal experience and vision of the contemporary situation.

The appendix that closes the book is devoted to a short analysis of the movement for the independence of India, starting from the person who is considered the founder of it, Mohandas Gandhi, then explaining the actions of this movement and its theoretical basis, to end with the negative aspect of British rule over India.

Between this publication and the beginning of the People’s Republic of China, less than two years after the assassination of M. Gandhi the 30<sup>th</sup> of January in 1948, 26 more books dedicated to Gandhi were published, in detail as follows:

- 1 in 1925
- 1 in 1926
- 4 in 1930
- 2 in 1932

<sup>1</sup> Gao Shan, Hua Lu (eds.) 高山、化鲁, *Gandhi zhuyi* 甘地主义 (Gandhism), Shanghai 上海, Shangwu yinshuguan 商务印书馆, 1924, 68 p.

<sup>2</sup> Luoman Luolan 罗曼·罗兰 (Rolland, Romain), *Gandhi xiaozhuan* 甘地小传 (Short biography of Gandhi), Shanghai 上海, Mei Yi meihui quanguo shubaobu 美以美会全国书报部, 1925 [transl. by Xie Songgao 谢颂羔, Mi Xingru 米星如]

<sup>3</sup> *Mahatma Gandhi*, Zurich, Rotapfel-Verlag, 1924.

<sup>4</sup> For his lecture of this work, see for instance Dattatreya Kaleakara (ed.), *Srimadbhagavadgita*, translated by Mohanadasa K. Gandhi, Ahmedabad, Navajivana Prakasana Mandira, 1960.

<sup>5</sup> He worked as a lawyer in South Africa from 1893 to 1896 and again from 1897 to 1901, this second time with his wife and sons. After few months in India travelling through the Country to know in person the difficulties of Indian Peoples, he’s back to South Africa by the end of 1901 where he starts in 1904 his first ashram near Phoenix (Natal), and in 1910 the Tolstoj Farm, near Johannesburg. Leaving South Africa definitely in 1914, he has defined his political means of “nonviolence”, having used it many times during these years for the Indian community.

3 in 1933  
 2 in 1934  
 1 in 1935  
 3 in 1936  
 1 in 1939  
 3 in 1943  
 1 in 1944  
 5 in 1948.

We may notice a moderate interest for Gandhi in the middle of the Twenties, after his release from jail in 1924, whereas there is considerable increase of interest after 1930, after the proclamation of the independence of India by the Congress Party, and the year of the salt march, the 380 km walked on foot from his Sabarmati *hashram*, near Ahmedabad, to Dandi, on the Indian Ocean riverside, where he deliberately extracted the salt in violation of the British monopoly on it. Three of them are translations of books written by Romain Rolland (translation from English and a revised and enlarged edition of 1924's *Mahatma Gandhi*)<sup>6</sup> and the Austrian/German writer René Fülöp-Miller (1891-1963)<sup>7</sup>, while the fourth, an analysis of Indian situation and its changes after the political actions of M. Gandhi, has been edited by Wang Senran<sup>8</sup>.

Two years later, as Gandhi's interactions with the British rulers continue with talks and imprisonments, a first translation of his essays known as "The story of my experiments with truth" was made by Ming Yaowu 明尧五, and it had a good reception, considering its immediate second reprint the following year<sup>9</sup>. This is the *Autobiography* that Gandhi published in the Gujarati review *Navajivan* (that he directed since 1919) explaining his principles and actions up to 1921. The first English translation of it from Gujarati by Mahadev Desai appears in 1927 edited by Navajivan Trust<sup>10</sup>. The same year Li Yuanjing (1894-1950), a Buddhist, wrote an essay celebrating Gandhi and his *ahimsa* (not injuring or killing other living beings)<sup>11</sup>.

The following year, 1933, a translation by Wu Yaozong 吴耀宗 of the revised and enlarged autobiography of Gandhi from 1922 to 1924, edited by C.F. Andrews, was published by Qingnian xiehui shuju 青年协会书局<sup>12</sup>, followed in 1934 by a new translation by Xiang Da 向达, showing a stable moderate interest for Gandhi that will increase until the beginning of the war with Japan<sup>13</sup>.

The autobiography of M. Gandhi will be translated anew by Nan Liuru 南柳如 in 1936<sup>14</sup>, while in 1948 the success of his political actions with the independence of India (finally conquered the year before) and his assassination, amid the civil war between PCC and GMD, will bring about the re-edition of his biographies and some more reflections on his way of intervention in the human arena<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Luolan Luoman 罗兰 罗曼 (Rolland Romain), *Gandi fendou shi* 甘地奋斗史 (The battles of Gandhi), Shanghai 上海, Qingyun tushu gongsi 卿云图书公司, 1930, 112 p. [translated from English by Xie Ji 谢济], *Gandi* 甘地 (Mahatma Gandhi), Shanghai 上海, Shangwu yinshuguan 商务印书馆, 1930, 167 p. [transl. by Chen Zuoliang 陈作梁].

<sup>7</sup> Fulepu Mile 孚勒普密勒 (René Fülöp-Miller), *Lienin yu gandhi* 列宁与甘地 (Lenin and Gandhi), Shanghai 上海, Huatong shuju 华通书局, 1930, 2 voll. [transl. by Wu Guangjian 伍光健; ed. or. *Lenin und Gandhu*, Zürich, Leipzig, Wien, Amalthea-Verl., 1927].

<sup>8</sup> Wang Senran (ed.) 王森然, *Yindu geming yu Gandi* 印度革命与甘地 (The Indian Revolution and Gandhi), Beijing 北平, Wenhua xueshe 文化学社, 354 p.

<sup>9</sup> Gandi 甘地 (Mapatma Gand [sic]), *Gandi zizhuan* 甘地自传 (The story of my experiments with truth), Shanghai 上海, Dadong shuju 大东书局, 1932, 308 p.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.mkgandhi.org/autobio/autobio.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Li Yuanjing 李圆净, *Gandi de jiesha zhuyi* 甘地的戒杀主义 (The vegetarianism of Gandhi), Shanghai 上海, Foxue shuju 佛学书局, 20p.

<sup>12</sup> Gandi 甘地 (Mohandas K. Gandhi), *Gandi zizhuan* 甘地自传 (Autobiography of Mohandas K. Gandhi), Shanghai 上海, Qingnian xiehui shuju 青年协会书局, 1933, 334 p. [C.F. Andrews (ed.), transl. Wu Yaozong 吴耀宗].

<sup>13</sup> Gandi 甘地 (Mohandas K. Gandhi), *Gandi zizhuan* 甘地自传 (Autobiography of Mohandas K. Gandhi), Shanghai 上海, Zhonghua shuju 中华书局, 1934, 306 p. [C.F. Andrews (ed.), transl. Xiang Da 向达].

<sup>14</sup> Gandi 甘地 (Mohandas K. Gandhi), *Gandi zhuan* 甘地传 (Biography of Mohandas K. Gandhi), Chongqing 重庆, Zhengzhong shuju 正中书局, 1936, 154 p. [transl. And ed. Nan Liuru 南柳如].

<sup>15</sup> Gandi 甘地 (Mohandas Gandhi), *Gandi zizhuan* 甘地自传 (Autobiography of Mohandas K. Gandhi), Shanghai 上海, Qingnian xiehui shuju 青年协会书局, 1948/1, 358 p. [C.F. Andrews (ed.), transl. Wu Yaozong 吴耀宗, revised and enlarged edition]; Gandi 甘地 (Mohandas K. Gandhi), *Gandi zi xu zhuan* 甘地自叙传 (An Analysis of the Autobiography of M. K. Gandhi), Shanghai

The analysis made by Chen Biyun 陈碧云, firstly published in 1935, reprinted later in December 1947<sup>16</sup>, aimed to the primary school students, argues in its last chapter that the political proposition of Gandhi have too many contradictions to be successful in giving Indian people the freedom from British rule, statement that sounds quite strange considering that since August 1947 India was independent, even if partitioned from Pakistan.

In 1943, Guo Shanshi 锅山实 and Tian Nong 田农 published a book on the two most important figures of Indian independence, M. Gandhi and the Pandit Nehru<sup>17</sup>, precisely the same year in which Zhi Mo 止默 publishes a book on Gandhi softly questioning the possibility for the “non resistance” to succeed in time of war, and in what he presents as the normally existing Hobbesian “homo homini lupus” situation<sup>18</sup>.

In a similar direction is the analysis offered by Mai Liang 麦浪 in a 1944’s book, extremely critic with Gandhi’s positions, for instance, considering him very conservative and a-scientific for his being against firearms<sup>19</sup>. Quite the opposite, the biography written by Mi Wenkai and Xue Liusen in 1948 is very celebrative for the Mahatma<sup>20</sup>.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that we read words written by Chinese people in the Republican period expressing deep esteem for M. Gandhi and his life, but in many cases matched with skepticism on the possibility to apply his experiments to China.

---

Monica DE TOGNI, studiosa di storia della Cina contemporanea, è ricercatrice presso il Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici dell’Università degli Studi di Torino. Ha conseguito il dottorato di ricerca in «Civiltà dell’India e dell’Asia Orientale» presso l’Università Ca’ Foscari di Venezia, e annovera tra le sue pubblicazioni la monografia *Governo locale e socializzazione politica in Cina. L’autogoverno locale nel Sichuan tra fine impero e inizio Repubblica*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell’Orso, 2007.

---

上海, Shijie shuju 世界书局, 1948, 260 p. [transl. Zhang Tiansong 张天松].

<sup>16</sup> Chen Binyun 陈碧云, *Gandi 甘地* (Gandhi)[Chuzhong xuesheng wenku 初中学生文库 The Library for middle school studentes], Shanghai 上海, Zhonghua shuju 中华书局, 1947, 56 p. [first edition 1935].

<sup>17</sup> Guo Shanshi 锅山实, Tian Nong 田农, *Gandi yu Nihelu 甘地与尼赫鲁* (Gandhi and Nehru), Xijing 新京, Yizhi shuju 益智书店, 1943, 201 p.

<sup>18</sup> Zhi Mo 止默, *Gandi lun 甘地论* (Essay on Gandhi), Chongqing 重庆, Meixue chubanshe, 美学出版社, 1943, 109 p.

<sup>19</sup> Mai Liang 麦浪, *Gandi sixiang yu Yindu minzu jiefang yundong 甘地思想与印度民族解放运动* (Gandhi and the Indian National Independence Movement), 1944, 96 p. [The book may be found at [http://book.chaoxing.com/ebook/read\\_11343662.html](http://book.chaoxing.com/ebook/read_11343662.html)]

<sup>20</sup> Mi Wenkai 糜文开, Xue Liusen 薛镛森, *Shengxiong Gandi zhuan 圣雄甘地传* (Biography of Mahatma Gandhi), Shanghai 上海, Shangwu yinshuguan 商务印书馆, 1948, 196 p.